

DECLASSIFIED  
PA/HO Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
April 21, 2005

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~

ACTION

June 26, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Marshall Wright *MW*  
SUBJECT: Somali Seizure of American Freighter,  
"The Midnight Sun"

On June 25 a Somali naval vessel seized and forced into a Somali port an American freighter, allegedly for violating Somali territorial waters.

The vessel is "The Midnight Sun". She is small (180 gross tons) -- and has aboard eight people (five Americans and three Singaporean crew members). The vessel is American-owned and registered and is chartered to Geophysical Services Inc. of Dallas Texas, a subsidiary of Texas Instruments. Geophysical Services is a legitimate and well known oil exploration company. As of now, there is no reason to suspect hanky-panky -- but I have asked State to check this out carefully. The vessel has \$200,000 of "very technical seismic recording equipment" aboard -- and this could arouse Somali suspicions.

According to a message received by the company from the captain of the vessel, the vessel was 10 to 20 miles off the Somali coast at the time of seizure. (The Somalis claim jurisdiction of 12 miles.) "The Midnight Sun" was ordered to stop, did not, the Somali naval vessel fired a shot across the bow, "The Midnight Sun" stopped, and was then ordered into the port of Chisimaio (pronounced KISS-a-MY-oh). Chisimaio is located some 250 miles south of Mogadiscio and near the Kenya border. It is a town of some 50 to 60 thousand people.

State Department first heard of the seizure through a call from Texas Congressman J.J. Pickle's office on the afternoon of June 25. Pickle had been approached by the company as a result of a message from the ship. sent prior to the vessel's arrival at Chisimaio. The ship's radio has been silent since arrival in the port.

State is in touch with the company and has, of course, put our Embassy in Mogadiscio to work. The problem is complicated by the fact that today is a Muslim holiday, and all the Somali government offices are closed.

Thus far, our Embassy has been able only to confirm that the vessel is in Chisimaio.

We have a number of resources.. There is, apparently, a local agent in Mogadiscio of Geophysical Services Inc. We also have an Army Engineer detachment of 3 people working on the port in Chisimaio. Finally, we have 3 AID civilians stationed in Chisimaio. Our Embassy has the pedal down trying to get in contact with all these people in addition to relevant Somali government officials. We should be hearing soon.

We recently terminated our AID program to Somalia. An anti-American press campaign resulted and could be a factor in this situation. However, as of now, we have no reason to think the seizure was anything more than a fluke -- and no reason to think that the release of the vessel and the crew cannot be amicably arranged once our Embassy has cornered the appropriate Somali officials. So far the press is not aware of the seizure, and Chisimaio is an extremely remote place. I have asked State to suggest to the company that all publicity be avoided for the moment in the hopes that we can keep Somali nationalist pride from becoming a factor in the situation.

We are on top of it here, and I do not think anything is required of you until the situation becomes clearer. I suggest, however, that you let the President know of this cloud upon the horizon and recommend that you sign the attached memorandum to the President.